

Lydia Schwartz, *Insight News*

The beautiful and historic downtown St. Paul Union Depot Station is being restored and brought to new life as a transit hub for the entire Twin Cities community, serving as the Central Corridor Light Rail Transit (CCLRT) line's eastern terminus. Rail cars will be cleaned and housed a few blocks east in the new Operations and Maintenance Facility, which is currently under construction on the corner of East 4th and North Broadway Streets.

CCLRT is scheduled to be operational in 2014 and construction of the line has created almost four thousand jobs across the Twin Cities. Government officials agree that the construction of the Union Depot Station is a wonderful example of public and private-sector partners working together toward a shared vision. Minnesota's transportation investments in light rail will last for much longer than just the next quarter, or next year, but for upcoming generations of transit users. In the future, this station will be a benefit to people that we may never meet. It is our friends and neighbors that are moving transit technology forward, and making something that benefits everyone.

US Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood says that the working men and women making renovations to the depot, and building a new operation and maintenance facility, are an excellent example for building America's next generation of transportation. "Many people in our country do not have the opportunity to work on a project like this," he says. "These are American infrastructures, being built by Americans. What you are doing here today, is a model for America, right here! We all know that our friends and neighbors need jobs, and this is what it is all about."

The Central Corridor Light Rail Line, one of the most heavily traveled transit corridors in the region, stretches 11-miles west from Union Depot Station. Government officials expect that there will be more than 40,000 weekday commuters by the year 2030. The line wraps around the State Capitol, travels along University Avenue West, over Highway 280, through the University of Minnesota campus, and finally connects with the Hiawatha Light Rail Line in downtown Minneapolis.

Back in April, the Federal Transit Administrator, Peter Rogoff, authorized the \$474 million Full Funding Grant Agreement to build the CCLRT. After a fire destroyed the original depot in 1915,

federal funding was provided for Minnesotans to reconstruct the building. "The Union Depot was built ninety years ago and is now being renovated," he says excitedly. "These are projects that put people to work on something which improve the quality of life for all of us."

US Representatives Keith Ellison (DFL-Minneapolis) and Betty McCollum (DFL-Saint Paul) support President Barack Obama's American Jobs Act, because it creates local construction projects like Union Depot Station. It is a comprehensive plan that helps job seekers, businesses, communities, and educators. The act also makes significant investments in infrastructure to modernizing our roads, railways and airports, while putting hundreds of thousands of workers back on the job. Ellison argues that "now is the time to reinvest in America, to put people to work, and create safe transportation."

President Obama hopes that the American Jobs Act will encourage entrepreneurial growth by completely eliminating payroll taxes for businesses that increase their payroll, either by adding new workers or increasing employee wages. Additional tax credits are added if they hire unemployed veterans, more if they hire veterans with service-connected disabilities. The American Jobs Act includes innovative, work-based reforms to prevent layoffs and to give states greater flexibility to use federal funds for connecting local job seekers to employers. It builds on and improves state programs that make placements for temporary work, volunteering, or pursuing on-the-job training. The plan encourages innovative entrepreneurship and wage-insurance programs that empower states to help reemploy older workers and create programs that make it easier for unemployed workers to start their own businesses.

MN Governor Mark Dayton, a proven national leader in transportation, is energized by the American Jobs Act and hopes that Congress will be able to pass it. "I express my gratitude to President Obama because he is putting people to work here in Minnesota!" he says. "And we have a lot of ideas here [in easing traffic problems]."

Besides transportation projects, Obama calls for the modernizing of both urban and rural public schools across the country—including new science labs and Internet-ready classrooms. The bill prevents teacher layoffs and keeps emergency first responders, including firefighters and police officers, on the job. Wireless internet access will be expanded for first responders and access will be extended to most of Americans.

The *American Jobs Act* will put people back to work rehabilitating homes, businesses, and stabilizing communities. It improves reemployment services for the long-term unemployed and

expands job opportunities for low-income youth and adults by investing in promising and proven strategies and programs, like summer jobs and sector-based training programs.